DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 132 060 SO 009 547

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TITLE Evaluation of the First Year of "Educational Services for Citizens Involved with Land Use" Conducted by the Center for Community Organization and Area Development.
INSTITUTION Augustana Coll., Sioux Falls, S. Dak. Center for Community Organization and Area Development.
PUB DATE Jul 76
NOTE 16p.; Not available in hard copy due to poor legibility of original document

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; *Citizen Participation; *Community Information Services; Educational Programs; Information Systems; *Land Use; Local Government; Local Issues; Post Secondary Education; Program Evaluation; *Public Officials; *Public Policy
IDENTIFIERS South Dakota (Sioux Falls)

ABSTRACT

An assessment is made of the effectiveness of the first year of a delivery system of educational services for citizens involved with the issue of land use in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. One objective, to establish an overall educational program, was successful in that an accepted, dynamic organizational structure was created. A unified and coordinated program dealing with land use issues was not satisfactorily developed. Most successful among the efforts to develop a variety of educational services were "enablers"--individuals working in their local areas on local problems on a face-to-face basis. Other efforts included county forums on land use issues; "fast forum" opinionnaires; radio and television messages; and construction of a computer file of all individuals, organizations, and public officials in the area who are concerned with land use issues. An objective to facilitate citizen efforts to influence public officials and decision makers has not yet been successful. Once citizens become fully informed and adequately organized, it should be possible for them to exert significant influence. Recommendations for the program include unifying a focus on land issues, modifying enabler training programs, quickly producing a tangible outcome from group discussions, and developing a conceptual model and action plan for exerting influence on public decision making. (AV)

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EVAULATION OF THE FIRST YEAR OF "EDUCATIONAL SERVICES FOR CITIZENS INVOLVED WITH LAND USE" CONDUCTED BY THE CENTER FOR COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION AND AREA DEVELOPMENT

July 1976

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SP009547

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I. INTRODUCTION

Purposes

The stated purpose of the CENCOAD program of "Educational Services for Citizens Involved with Land Use" is to "demonstrate and evaluate a comprehensive delivery system of educational services for citizens in 18 counties around Sioux Falls, South Dakota, who are involved with the issue of land use." The main purpose of the research described in this report was to evaluate the effectiveness of the CENCOAD program at the end of its first year of activity. A secondary purpose was to generate a set of recommendations for strengthening that program.

Program

The four operational objectives of the CENCOAD program are to (1) deliver educational services to citizens in the 18-county area surrounding Sioux Falls; (2) demonstrate a comprehensive delivery system involving a variety of educational services; (3) measure the impact of the project on public policy decisions concerning land use; and (4) evaluate the potential transferability of the delivery system to other issues and areas. Since the last of these objectives will not be pursued until the second year of the program, however, this initial-year evaluation is limited to the first three objectives.

The program utilizes seven different procedures for delivering educational services to citizens and involving them in public decision making. These are as follows:

-- Enablers. These citizens contract with CENCOAD to work on a part-time basis as communicators, facilitators, and organizers in their local neighborhoods and communities. CENCOAD provides them with training and assistance, but the enablers act autonomously in selecting the local issues or problems on which they wish to focus. They constitute the dynamic core of the whole program.

-- Conceptual grids. These are matrix charts used to identify all relevant dimensions and aspects of land use planning and relate them to potential costs and problems of various kinds. It is strictly a planning tool.

-- County forums. The purpose of these formal meetings, organized on a county-wide basis by the CENCOAD staff in collaboration with the enablers and a few key citizens in that county, is to inform citizens about various aspects of land use planning and give them an opportunity to raise questions about and discuss the process.

-- Fast Forums. These opinionnaires, covering topics of immediate concern to involved citizens and enablers, enable citizens to express their opinions concerning the issue at hand, to learn what others think about this issue, and to communicate their views to public officials.

-- Networks. Ad hoc collections of individuals and organizations from throughout the entire area who are concerned about a specific issue or problem. As the members of a network become aware of each other and communicate with one another about their common concerns, they form potential bases for collection action.

-- Mass communications. Use of local newspapers, radio, and television to both (a) acquaint citizens with the activities of CENCOAD, and (b) inform them of events, problems, and programs relevant to land use planning.

-- Data bank. A computerized file of several thousand people in the area who have expressed interest or become involved in land use planning or other CENCOAD activities, catalogued by areas of concern.

Data

Data for this evaluative research were obtained from five different sources:

(1) Unstructured lengthy personal interviews with several members of the CENCOAD staff.

(2) Structured telephone interviews with six members of the CENCOAD Board of Directors.

(3) Semi-structured lengthy personal interviews with the 12 most active enablers (conducted in pairs to stimulate additional informal discussion).

(4) Structured telephone interviews with six county and state officials who had had contacts with the CENCOAD program. (These officials represented the state Division of Social Services and Human Relations, the state Planning Bureau, the state Department of Education and Cultural Affairs, the Southeastern Council of Governments in Sioux Falls, the District III Planning Office in Yankton, and the Model Rural Development Program in Watertown.)

(5) Structured brief telephone interviews with 47 citizens throughout the area who had been involved in the CENCOAD program during the past year. (This was in no sense a random sample of the total population.)

II. FINDINGS

The results of this evaluation study are presented here in terms of the three goals of (1) establishing an overall educational program, (2) developing a variety of educational services, and (3) influencing public policy formation.

Overall Program

In terms of the number of people reached, the CENCOAD program was highly successful during its first year, since over 6000 people throughout the 18-county area had at least one personal contact with it. There is no way of knowing what proportion of these contacts dealt with land use issues, although of the 47 involved citizens interviewed for this study, 51 percent had had three or more contacts with an enabler concerning land use. All of the respondents who had experienced such contacts described them as either "somewhat," "quite," or "extremely" useful in learning more about land use planning. However, only 37 percent of those respondents said they developed more positive attitudes toward land use planning as a result of their contacts; 3 percent became less favorable; and 60 percent did not change their attitudes. Since these people were among those most involved with CENCOAD throughout the year, it is questionable whether the program had any major impacts on the general public thus far.

(Cross-tabulations of the survey findings suggest that women were more likely than men to develop favorable attitudes toward land use planning; people over age 45 were more likely to do so than those under 45; persons who were not college graduates were more likely than graduates to do so; and those living in towns of 1000 or more were more likely to do so than those living in rural areas or small villages.)

Members of the Board of Directors believed that, in general, CENCOAD had been fairly successful thus far in making citizens more aware of long-term problems and trends in their communities, building communication links among people, and helping people learn to work together to solve common problems.

All of the enablers were quite enthusiastic about their terms as catalyst, stimulant, interpreter, mediator, and facilitator. They have spent these past months learning their roles, making contacts in the community, learning about local issues, gaining visibility, acquiring legitimacy, and initiating projects (many of which have dealt with land use in one way or another).

CENCOAD's policy of encouraging the enablers to work on whatever problems were of immediate concern in their neighborhood or community has had the beneficial outcome of tapping the widest possible base of citizen interest and participation. By "going to where the people are at" rather than expecting the people "to come to where we are at," the enablers have developed a sound foundation of local support for their role and for CENCOAD as an organization. As a result, however, there has been no overall programmatic focus or coordination. Each enabler has, in effect, been "out there doing his or her own thing in the local area," and thus far there has been no attempt to implement a comprehensive integrated program on land use.

Most of the board members and enablers felt that the CENCOAD program had been successful in making citizens more aware of land use issues. Unfortunately, however, these efforts have encountered considerable apathy and opposition, since many people do not view land use as a public problem and consider any form of

planning to be "outside interference." As a result, CENCOAD has had very little success thus far in generating any kind of action pertaining to land use. All the board members interviewed said that little had been accomplished in this area beyond raising people's awareness of the issues, although they thought that development of land use planning programs should be a major long-range goal for CENCOAD in the future. When the enablers were asked to describe their most successful activity to date, only one of the 12 mentioned a land use problem (finding a suitable sanitary landfill for his community). In contrast, six of the 12 mentioned some kind of land use problem as their least successful activity to date.

In sum, CENCOAD has created a viable, accepted, and dynamic organizational structure during this past year, but has not yet developed a unified and coordinated program dealing with land use issues. Given local attitudes toward land use planning, a great deal of effort may be required over several years to achieve significant accomplishments in this area, but at least the organization is now ready to begin that endeavor.

Specific Services

Enablers. The core of the CENCOAD program and clearly its most significant educational service is its set of enablers, working in their local areas on local problems on a face-to-face basis. As they talked about their role as an enabler for CENCOAD, these people together mentioned six types of functions that can be viewed as a hierarchy of increasing community development, as follows:

-- Communication--letting people know what's happening in the community and what other people are thinking and feeling.

-- Education--helping people become aware of common problems, collective resources, and possible solutions.

-- Stimulation--creating citizen interest in community problems and willingness to do something about them.

-- Coordination--pulling resources, individuals, and organizations together for collective action on community problems.

-- Mediation--assisting in resolving conflicts between various interests and groups in the community.

-- Leadership--pointing the way to new community goals and development opportunities and persuading people to adopt them.

Most of the enablers have tended to concentrate their efforts thus far on the first three functions of communication, education, and stimulation, and have not become extensively involved in the more active functions of coordination, mediation, and leadership. This is quite understandable, since these latter functions can be effective only if preceded by the first three. Nevertheless, the enablers differ considerably in their conception of how active a role they should take in promoting community activity and change. Some of them favor a more passive stance stressing communication and education, while others would like to play a much more dynamic role as community change agents. This issue clearly requires examination and resolution.

In addition, the enablers also mentioned several other problems which have plagued them this first year. The most frequently mentioned of these were the following: (1) How to identify potential public issues and problems before they surface as overt conflicts. (2) How to overcome citizen apathy and get people interested and involved in public affairs. (3) How to work with technical problems such as those involved in land use planning, about which they know very little. (4) How to remain neutral on highly controversial issues. (5) How to deal with public officials in order to exert influence on them.

All of the enablers described the training they have received from the CENCOAD staff as extremely helpful to them in learning how to perform their role. Mentioned as especially helpful were: (a) the exchange of experiences and suggestions among the enablers at these sessions, which for many of them was their major source of ideas for coping with problems they were facing; and (b) the emotional support and encouragement they received from the staff and gave each other, which many of them felt was crucial in enabling them to continue performing their roles. In

general, they much preferred this kind of informal, group-centered, self-directed training over more formal instruction by the staff on problem-solving techniques and similar topics.

None of the enablers have made very extensive use of the various teaching aids--discussion guidelines, group decision-making steps, etc--prepared by the staff. The feeling of many of them was that these materials were too abstract, formal, and full of technical "jargon" to be of help when working with citizens. Several of them have used the land use simulation exercise provided by the staff, however, and have found it quite useful, since it involves active participation by the citizens. They would like to have more simulation games, though of no more than one-and-a-half hours in duration. The tapes, slides, and other audiovisual materials provided by the staff have also been well received by the enablers and the citizens, and many of the enablers would like to make more use of such materials in the future. They would also like to be involved in producing these materials.

Conceptual grids. These are basically a staff planning tool, not an educational service. They were of some use to the staff at the beginning of the project in identifying potential topics and issues on which to focus, but they quickly proved to be inadequate in scope. Their primary deficiency is that they do not take into account the complex sets of values, attitudes, and interests that underly all land use decisions and planning. Hence to be of any further use they must be elaborated considerably beyond their present form. Even then, however, they can be used effectively only by the staff and enablers, and do not provide a means of communicating with the public.

County forums. Although forums were held in five of the counties within the area during the past year, they were not a very salient activity to the enablers, for a majority of them either did not know anything about the forums or had not attended one. The principal purposes of the forums are to inform citizens about

land use issues, create awareness of problems pertaining to land use, and stimulate interest in attacking those problems. Although approximately 275 people attended those five forums, it is questionable how well this informative function was fulfilled. Of the involved citizens surveyed, 78 percent had not attended a forum, and only about half of those who had attended found them to be "somewhat" or "quite" useful as a means of learning more about land use. In fact, the staff and those enablers who had helped organize the forums generally agreed that the small planning sessions held prior to the forums produced more dynamic exchanges of ideas than did the forums themselves.

Related to the county forums, but smaller and more informal in style, are community and neighborhood meetings. Although they were not originally conceptualized as one of the educational services of the program, many of the enablers arranged such meetings to promote discussion among citizens on local issues. Close to 500 people attended such meetings during the course of the year, and the enablers who used this approach were all quite enthusiastic about its effectiveness as a communication and educational technique.

Fast Forums. Half of the enablers made some use of a Fast Forum opinionnaire during the year. Both they and the staff believe that this is an effective means of stimulating people's interest in issues, letting them know what others think about these issues, and formulating common goals for action. However, some of the enablers felt that the opinionnaires they developed were too complex and covered too many topics. They stressed the point that opinionnaires should be restricted to a single specific topic, and should be constructed by the citizens themselves. It is also vitally important that the results be fed back to the people as quickly as possible, so as to maintain their interest in the process. In addition, the point was frequently made that the tabulated results from Fast Forum opinionnaires provided an extremely valuable basis for promoting group discussion and action planning at future meetings. Approximately 3800 citizens completed an opinionnaire

during the year, although only 20 percent of the involved citizens interviewed said they had filled out one on land use. Of these people, almost all said they thought the opinionnaires were a valuable communication technique.

A secondary function of these opinionnaires is to communicate public opinion to public officials. Several of the officials interviewed stressed the point, however, that an opinionnaire must deal with issues of direct concern to them if it were to be of any use to them. In other words, officials are usually anxious to receive public opinion input as long as it is relevant to their needs as they define them. This means that the officials who will be the recipients of opinionnaires must generally be consulted in the process of constructing the opinionnaires and allowed to have some say on the questions asked. As a result, opinionnaires intended to provide input to decision makers may be quite different from those intended to promote communication only among citizens. Some people may object that cooperating with decision makers in this manner leaves citizen groups open to potential cooperation by the officials, but this is not inevitable, and only through such cooperation is it realistic to expect officials to pay serious attention to opinionnaire results.

Networks. Some disagreement presently exists within the staff as to whether networks can be created around latent common interests, or just identified as they spontaneously emerge. This question can only be answered through experimentation, but it obviously must be resolved one way or the other before extensive use can be made of this technique. A related unresolved question is the degree to which networks, once in existence, can be organized to deal with common problems. Must they remain merely communication channels, or can they be mobilized for collective action? And if a network can be organized for action, how can this be accomplished? Thus far, however, only a few tentative efforts have been made by the staff to locate emerging networks, so that this approach has not yet been adequately tested.

Mass communications. Over 20 radio and television messages of varying length

were produced during the year, but there is no way of knowing how many people received these messages or paid any attention to them. Most of the involved citizens interviewed had received one or more of these messages, but they cannot be considered at all representative of the general public. On the basis of general social scientific knowledge of mass media reception, however, one would expect that such messages are useful as a means of making CENCOAD known to the public and legitimizing its activities, but that relatively few people receive much educational benefit from these messages. It has repeatedly been demonstrated that most such messages are received only by people who are already familiar with and accepting of them, while other people either ignore or reject the messages. In contrast, local newspapers in the area appear to be widely read, so that stories about CENCOAD activities can be quite valuable as a means of informing the public about them. Several enablers mentioned that many people in their neighborhoods and communities had commented to them about articles they saw describing CENCOAD activities, so that these enablers were anxious to gain as extensive newspaper coverage of their work as possible.

Data bank. The staff is presently in the process of constructing computer files of all individuals, organizations, and public officials in the area who are concerned with land use issues. When this effort is completed, it will provide the principal means of identifying and promoting networks of people and organizations with common interests. One difficulty that has become apparent, however, is that it is extremely difficult to keep the list of individual names current. Hence it may become necessary to limit the data bank to information on groups, organizations, institutions, and officials. Nevertheless, the enablers could still --as some of them are doing--keep their own card files of information on all the people with whom they come into contact in their work.

Public Influence

The third goal of the CENCOAD program is to facilitate efforts by citizens to

influence public officials and decision makers. As previously mentioned, however, the enablers are divided over the extent to which their roles should go beyond communicative and educational activities to promoting citizen action. The goals of citizen education and citizen participation are clearly interrelated, for citizens must be knowledgeable of the issues before they can participate effectively in collective decision making. But a program such as CENCOAD's has the option of stopping with informational and educational functions, or going on to organize, coordinate and promote collective actions. Five of the six board members interviewed felt that the CENCOAD program should include action aimed at influence exertion, while eight of the twelve enablers took this stance.

More generally, most board members and enablers felt that it is possible for citizens to exert significant influence on public officials and decision makers, once the citizens have become fully informed and adequately organized. They therefore see public education as the short-term goal of the CENCOAD program, while public participation is the long-term goal. Many of them also stressed the point that the best way of exerting influence on decision makers was by building cooperation and consensus with them through time, not by using confrontation or conflict tactics.

The public officials interviewed had all had some contact with CENCOAD, though primarily with staff members rather than enablers. Most of them held positive attitudes toward CENCOAD, as illustrated by these statements:

> One of the most creative community development organizations in the state.
>
> I find the enabler program to be a very innovative and exciting idea.
>
> Our planning for citizen participation has benefited greatly from our contacts with CENCOAD.

At the same time, several of these officials also commented that they knew very little about the CENCOAD program, but that they would like to know more. Three of the six officials said they had had some form of conflict or problem with CENCOAD in the past and still felt somewhat warry of collaborating too closely with

CENCOAD, although they no longer felt any hostility toward CENCOAD or its program. The other three officials had had no problems or conflicts with CENCOAD.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that all of these officials reported that virtually no influence had been exerted on them or their agencies on substantive agencies by CENCOAD personnel or as a result of its program. In short, the third objective of the program has apparently not yet been achieved to any noticeable degree. Three of the six officials did say, however, that their thinking about citizen participation and community organization procedures had been stimulated by the example of CENCOAD. In other words, public officials are being influenced by CENCOAD in organizational and operational terms, if not on substantive issues.

Finally, these officials would generally like to have CENCOAD work more closely with their agencies in dealing with local issues--although they appear to envision CENCOAD as helping them to do their jobs, and not as being a source of external pressure of change.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of recommendations made by the enablers or other people interviewed in this research were included in the presentation of findings in the previous section. This concluding section consists of several additional recommendations offered by the researcher on the basis of this study.

1. Move toward giving the program a unified focus on land use issues. Enablers could work with different aspects of the overall concern, depending on local needs and problems, but their work should be more coordinated and integrated.

2. Although discussion and learning are necessary initial steps in any citizen involvement program, after a time they cease to interest and motivate most people as an end in themselves. To sustain interest and motivation in a topic, participants must obtain some kind of tangible outcome. With the CENCOAD program, these outcomes might include: formulating common position statements, designing

action programs, creating ongoing task forces, exerting influence on decision makers, etc.

3. As described in the proposal for the second year of the program, the enabler role will emphasize information, communication, and education, yet most of the enablers want to play a more dynamic role in developing their communities. Resolve this question of how active a role the enablers should take in organizing and leading action programs, and work out guidelines with the enablers for the performance of their role within these overall parameters.

4. In the enabler training program, give particular attention to the problems of (a) how to interest citizens in public affairs, (b) how to remain neutral on controversial issues, and (c) how to interact with public officials so as to have some influence on them. These topics can probably be explored most effectively through group discussions in which the enablers share with each other their experiences in such situations.

5. In their present form, the enabler reports are largely useless, consisting of either lengthy descriptions of minor details or just a few very general statements. Substitute monthly reports with a standard format, such as (a) objectives, (b) actions, (c) problems, (d) outcomes, (e) plans. These reports could then be used as a basis for discussion in training sessions.

6. Although several of the enablers have held neighborhood or community meetings on specific topics, they have all been one-time affairs. Experiment with conducting a series of meetings (perhaps monthly) with the same group, covering either one topic in considerable depth or several interrelated topics. This procedure should not only build knowledge and interest among the participants, but also enable them to achieve tangible outcomes such as common position statements or collective action plans.

7. Opinionnaires are only as effective in facilitating communication as the thought and planning that goes into their construction and use. Careful thought

should therefore be given to the purpose for an opinionnaire to be used, who should contribute to its construction, and how the results will be utilized to promote further communication. Emphasis on sheer numbers of people completing opinionnaires is meaninglessness.

8. Use radio and television primarily to acquaint the public with CENCOAD and its purpose, not to inform or educate them on substantive issues. This goal might best be achieved by airing many very brief spot announcements. Use local newspapers to inform the public in greater detail about CENCOAD activities. Provide written copy to the papers rather than waiting for them to come to CENCOAD for stories.

9. Conceive of networks (especially organizational networks) as skeletons of community power structures, rather than as potential actors. Existing power structures and interorganizational relationships must be taken into account, responded to, and utilized in any effort to achieve community development or change, but the network itself will rarely if ever act as a collective entity. Action is taken by individuals and organizations; the existing networks define the social environment in which they act.

10. Develop a conceptual model and action plan for exerting influence on public decision making, for without it the 3rd CENCOAD goal of affecting public decisions will never be achieved. In general, influence exertion is not a matter of "educating" public officials or "developing" public agencies, but rather meeting with officials and agencies on their own grounds and building viable relationships--both consensual and conflicting--with them. Four possible bases on which influence exertion can rest are these:

-- Shared goals and mutual trust
-- Informal pressures and formal sanctions
-- Reciprocal need satisfaction
-- Performance of useful functions

To conclude, CENCOAD has essentially fulfilled its first-year objectives for this program, but a variety of new problems and demands must be dealt with during the second year. Already, however, this approach to promoting citizen participation and community development has excited a great many people, both in the Sioux Falls area and throughout the country.